15.0.7
5645

A DISCOURSE

ON THE DEATH OF

MRS. J. W. BOYNTON,

SOUTH COVENTRY.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF FRIENDS.

The White Robed Company.

A DISCOURSE

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

MRS. J. W. BOYNTON,

PREACHED IN THE VILLAGE CHURCH,

SOUTH COVENTRY,

SABBATH, MAY 5TH, 1850.

BY REV. HENRY B. BLAKE.

THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED.

HARTFORD:
PRESS OF CASE, TIFFANY AND COMPANY.
1850.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Boston Regional Library System

http://www.archive.org/details/whiterobedcompan00blak

SERMON.

REVELATIONS, 7: 13–15. AND ONE OF THE ELDERS ANSWERED, SAYING UNTO ME, WHAT ARE THESE WHICH ARE ARRAYED IN WHITE ROBES, AND WHENCE CAME THEY?

AND I SAID UNTO HIM, SIR, THOU KNOWEST. AND HE SAID TO ME, THESE ARE THEY WHICH CAME OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION AND HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES AND MADE THEM WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.

THEREFORE ARE THEY BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, AND SERVE HIM DAY AND NIGHT IN HIS TEMPLE: AND HE THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE SHALL DWELL AMONG THEM.

VERY wonderful are the revelations of this book of Scripture. John the beloved disciple, after a life of service, was banished in his old age to a lonely island in the Egean sea, for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. There he was in the spirit, and in a series of symbolical representations the history of the world was made to pass before him. Heaven was unfolded to his view and he was permitted to look in upon the blessed in their employments and their joys.

The text is taken from one of these visions, and brings to our minds three things.—The white robed multitude; "what are these which are arrayed in white robes—and whence came they?" The discipline through which they have come; "these are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The service in which they are engaged; "therefore are they before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple."

I propose to consider first, the tribulation through which the saints have come to heaven. Secondly, their state as indicated by their white robes. And thirdly, their employment in the service of God.

It is through great tribulation that the saints enter the heavenly state. Go and knock at the door of that great tomb which contains the precious dust that Christ watches over in its long slumber till the glorious morning of the resurrection, and ask how many perished by disease and the ordinary death of man; what multitudes have been all their life-time subject to bondage through fear of a persecuting foe; how many have been hunted like wild beasts from one hiding place to another till death was welcome! how many have dwelt long in damp and loathsome dungeons! how many have been thrown to wild beasts! how many have felt instruments of torture; how many have perished in the indiscriminate slaughter of persecution; how many have been burned at the stake! "And I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held, and they cried with a loud voice, saying, how long Oh Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth."

The saints who are permitted to live in outward peace come out of great tribulation. It was in view of spiritual struggles, which every child of God feels, that a holy apostle exclaimed, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" The spiritual conflicts of the Christian, the struggles of opposing principles within him, occur in silence and darkness, but they are often terrible and agonizing.

The saints are not exempted from the common woes of humanity. They taste the bitter cup of disappointment. They see and pass through the dark and deep waters of affliction. They feel the sundering of earthly ties. They know what it is to wish to lie down in the grave with some loved object. They have felt a void that can never be filled. They have seen the earth grow dark and desolate under the heavy hand of God. They are made often to feel that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They are brought often to a deep sense of their sins under the heavy chastisements of God. They are often made to sigh and long for their final rest under the burdens of life. The whole course of the Christian's life is sometimes one of sorrow and anguish. He sees little but darkness in this world, and God is fitting him in it all for the higher enjoyment of the light of heaven.

Death is often very terrible to the saint by reason of its physical sufferings. Sometimes men seem to pass away without a pang; the wheels of life stand still, and the spirit departs without a struggle. But often Christians whose end, spiritually, is peace and triumph, suffer extreme anguish of body in dissolution. When the powers of nature, originally strong, seem to gird themselves up to resist disease, and the struggle with death is protracted for hours, and every breath becomes a groan, the sight is terrible to witness. When in perfect consciousness the icy hand of death is felt by the dying, and the coldness that no heat can remove is slowly advancing to the vitals, who can tell the suffering. Nothing but extreme anguish could extort groans amid the ecstasy of the Christian's triumphant departure.

In some of these ways do the saints of God come out of great tribulation, but they soon pass beyond it. John tells us of a great company he saw, which no man could number, from all nations, arrayed in white robes and palms in their hands. Those who follow Christ, whey they pass from our sight, perish not. Safe beyond the storms of life and beyond the power of death they live. John saw them in his visions, and we shall see them if we follow in their footsteps.

The white robes in which the saints are clothed are indications of two things,—purity and brightness. However polluted they may have been here, however deep the defilement of sin into which they have sunk, they are now in heaven as pure as the stainless white. There is no touch of defilement on them. They look at the infinite purity of God and see there a portraiture to which their own hearts respond, feebly perhaps yet purely. As God is pure—as the cherubim and seraphim are pure, so are they pure, and they will remain so forever.

The robes of the saints are not only pure but also dazzling in their whiteness. You know that white is formed by a perfect blending of all the gorgeous colors of the rainbow. The word here has an intensity of meaning in it. There is a glorious brightness pertaining to those white robes which shines afar and shows the exhaltation and honor of those who wear them.

Pure and bright are the spirits in heaven, and there is a great company of them. They have gone up in the prophet's fiery chariot, from the dungeon and stake of persecution, from fields

of slaughter, from the lonely wilderness and deep caverns of the earth, from palace and cottage and every variety of circumstance. There are among them prophets, patriarchs, apostles, martyrs, kings, queens, citizens, peasants and slaves. Many whom we have known and loved are there. It is a glorious company and constantly increasing.

But these white robes have been washed in blood, and that blood was precious blood, it flowed from the cross. There will be no white robe in heaven not washed in this blood. Men may seek purification from other sources but they cannot find it. If we are ever found in heaven, if those white robes are ever thrown around us, they will be washed in the blood of Christ.

This white robed company of whom there are so many, are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. It was this remark of our deceased friend, the evening before her death, "I may be worshiping in the upper temple to-morrow", that turned my thoughts to the text as the subject of this discourse. The saints in heaven worship God in his temple. There are many wonderful things—many glorious things—many bliss-inspiring things in the works of God. But how much more wonderful and glorious and blissful is God himself, from whom all these emanate. We wonder and admire as some mystery of nature is unfolded to us, as we gaze along the track of God's almighty power in material things. What will it be then for the human soul to come into communion with God in the eternity of his being, the comprehensiveness of his government, the infinity of all his attributes. Shall we look on the dazzling brightness that is around the throne of Jehovah! shall we ever climb with ineffable enjoyment up among the high mysteries of his kingdom! shall we look on the splendors of that temple of which God is the light; shall we taste the raptures of that worship of which God alone is the object, and which is borne upward with the sound of many voices. We know little of the temple of God's holiness, little of God himself, little of the blessedness they enjoy who serve him day and night in his temple. But the reason we know so little is that our powers are so feeble and the object is so much above us. Heaven would be comparatively worthless if we

could comprehend it all here, if words could convey it to us, if our minds and hearts in their present feebleness could comprehend and feel its joys. It is infinitely glorious and blessed because it forever raises up its subjects to its enjoyments.

The eternal worship of God in his upper temple constitutes the chief employment and the chief joy of the company in white robes. There are other joys, subordinate to this, on which we cannot distinctly dwell here. To some of them the revelator alludes in the verses immediately following the text. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

There has recently passed away from among us one, who has gone, as we hope, to join them who are arrayed in white robes and worship God in his temple. You know it is not my custom to speak at large of the dead. The pious dead seek not our praises. They were humble on earth, and if they could speak to the minister of Christ who is to address the living over their graves, they would dissuade from panegyric; they would say, speak of us only in admonition to those we have left behind. If their spirits linger around us and hear our words, they would be repelled by adulation. We would speak of the departed only as admonishing us and furnishing to us examples. But when God rears any peculiar monument of his grace, either in the life or death of any Christian, he does it for us to look at; and we should be ungrateful to him and unmindful of the great moral lessons of his Providence, did we not give them a due consideration.

Eunice Stanley Boynton, whose death has recently caused so much mourning among us, was born May 26th, 1811, and married to him who now mourns her loss, May 2d, 1832. At twelve years of age she was greatly interested in the subject of religion and for a time indulged hope that she was a Christian. In after years she seems sometimes to have referred to that time as the date of her religious experience. At others she speaks of her seventeenth year as the beginning of her Christian life. At that time her views were clear and she had,

for a considerable season, great enjoyment in religion. She made a public profession of her faith in Christ, July 6th, 1828.

Of her early life I need not speak here. She was characterized in her riper years, by great prudence and kindness. The law of kindness was on her lips. She was not one of those who delight to spread an evil report; and she taught others, both by precept and example, to spare reputation and spread the cover of charity as far as possible over the faults of others. I ask no other evidence of her uniform kindness than the fact, that hundreds of hearts have bled at her death and the whole community has seemed to be in mourning. It has been said she had no enemies. It is not always an honor to be without enemies. Those who have much to do with all classes of their fellow men must not expect to live in the faithful discharge of duty without incurring the displeasure of others. But when persons in a more retired sphere live without enemies, we hold it as proof that the poor and sick are remembered, and that none ever receive any other tokens than those of kindness.

She was characterized by great energy in doing whatever called for her efforts. She did with her might whatsoever her hand found to do. She was not afraid of her own energies. She did not wait for others. This disposition may lead to excessive effort and the violation of the physical laws of our being; but up to the measure of our duty it is to be admired and imitated. Those who remember the labor of furnishing this house, preparatory to its dedication, know how much the promptness and beauty with which it was accomplished were owing to her untiring efforts, laboring herself and leading others along. This was only one exemplification of the general course of her life. She felt that life was given for action, and whatever duty her heavenly Father seemed to lay upon her, whether it concerned her own family or the welfare of others, she assumed with cheerfulness and spared not herself till it was discharged. In this particular, her example should put to shame many of us, who are so sparing of our energies, especially, when the benefit is to accrue to others.

As a Christian, so far as I have been able to learn, her course was always consistent, though not always marked, be-

fore the world, by anything to distinguish it from the ordinary course of consistent Christians. Her influence as a Christian, except that silent influence which a consistent, holy life always sheds on the world, was mostly confined to the circle of her family. God gave her, from time to time, nine young immortals to be moulded under a mother's influence. Here she felt was her work, and here the power of a Christian mother was known. These children she endeavored, by kindness, by example, by precept and by prayer, to train for heaven. She aimed early to impress upon their minds the absolute necessity and infinite importance of a personal interest in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners. She was solicitous and very careful in her instructions to them, respecting their observance of the Sabbath, their attendance on public worship, the Sabbath School and other means of grace. She endeavored in all faithfulness to do her duty to them, and she was deeply anxious for their salvation. May they never forget her prayers, her holy example and her counsels of heavenly wisdom!

In the revival of last year, Mrs. Boynton took a very deep interest. In the midst of its scenes, God was doubtless preparing her for what has followed in his holy providence. She desired greatly and prayed earnestly for the salvation of those of her friends and family, who were in an unconverted state; and when some of her hopes were disappointed, she could still trust in God, that what he had not given in answer to her prayer then, he would in his own time. Though she was not permitted to rejoice over the conversion of some for whom she prayed here, may she have that joy in heaven. In this infant church she took a deep interest, and in one of her letters at that period, the longing desire is expressed that this church might "never have a communion season, without having some new souls to come with them to celebrate the dying love of our Saviour."

Such in brief were some of the incidents and such the general course of her life. Such a life, we had reason to expect would be followed by such a Christian death. In her death she glorified God. The scene was one to linger among the hallowed remembrances of those who witnessed it, till memory itself shall perish.

She had a constitutional dread of suffering, and in former seasons of sickness, had been troubled with the fear of death. She shrunk from its pangs, she felt an uncertainty as to her fitness for it, and the thought of leaving her family was terrible; but at the end, these were all taken away. In her case, God verified his promise to his children, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." When she had not needed dying grace, she had not felt its sustaining power; but now, when God's time had come, He put beneath her the everlasting arms.

Her death was one of great physical suffering. She told her friends from the first attack, she had never known pain compared to that. "Oh," she would say, "you do not know how I suffer." Contrary to the expectations of her friends, this extreme suffering continued till the moment of the spirit's departure. Yet she did not complain. She asked her friends to pray that she might have patience. Her groans seemed involuntary, and when she felt the shuddering coldness of death on her, she only said, "*It is so cold,* cannot I get warm, or die?"

But notwithstanding this, her death was peaceful and triumphant. That beautiful lake, on which she so often looked from her residence, as her eye wandered over the congregation of the dead, was never more calm and unruffled in a summer's morning, than was her spirit in the hour of its departure. The sun never sunk to his rest behind the hills that girt that lake around, more serenely on a summer's evening, than her soul took its last survey of earthly things. The first time I saw her after the sudden attack which closed her life, she expressed the opinion it might be her last sickness and a perfect willingness to die. "I wish," she said, "I had strength to tell my friends how much I have enjoyed since I have been confined to this room.* While in health I have been occupied with cares, but here it has been so still and I have enjoyed so much." To others who were with her more, she spoke more fully, though her strength allowed only a few words at one time. It was a tale of peace, of communion with God, of joy in meditation on divine things, of calm and

* She had been confined to her room some weeks.

holy rapture. This state of feeling was, to my mind, an indication that her last sickness had come, for though we should not give too much heed to premonitions, as they are called, we have observed that when God has finished the preparation of his children for heaven, he does not usually leave them long on the earth.

She seemed to have completely given up every thing into the hands of God. She had no particular directions to give, even concerning her children, but said, God will take care of them." She made not the slightest allusion to any doubt of her good estate and had a perfect assurance, that the giving up of earth would be the beginning of heaven. On the evening before her death, as I stood by her bedside, she said, "you will remember me in your prayers to-morrow;" and then added, "I may be worshiping in the upper temple to-morrow." As death approached, her peace and joy seemed to rise higher. There was a light and beauty on her countenance that seemed celestial. We felt that a spirit of the upper world was lingering for a few moments on these mortal shores, and that to stand there was to stand "quite in the verge of heaven." The chariot and horses of fire, by which the prophet ascended, had been a fit vision to accompany such a scene. To her family and friends, she had said farewell. To her nearest friend, who stood overwhelmed by her side, she said, "weep not for me. Redeemed spirits are happy spirits." To others who stood around, she said, "you see here the emptiness of earthly things." To the question, is all peace, she replied, "Peace, *calm*." About one o'clock, it was evident her end was near. Perfectly conscious of time and every thing around her, with a look never to be forgotten, she uttered these exclamations, "Sabbath Morning!—Enter Heaven!—Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" and raising her hands, she clasped them in token of prayer, and within five minutes she breathed her last. How those words have lingered around me! Sabbath Morning! Enter heaven! Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!

At that time, Sabbath morning, April 14th, at a quarter past one o'clock, we doubt not a bright and pure spirit was added to the company in white robes. Angels who had rejoiced over its redemption from sin, and hovered around its pathway upward

to perfection, bore it up on their joyful wings to the throne of God. While we were worshiping in sorrow here on that Sabbath morning, she was tuning her golden harp for her everlasting song. We think of her now as clothed in white among the ransomed multitude worshiping in the upper temple. Pain with her is over; sorrow is ended; disease has done its last work, and Death is vanquished. She is safely over Jordan in the fair land of promise. As we mourned around her dying bed, when we looked into her angelic countenance the shout of victory almost broke from our lips. Oh how sublime then seemed the language of the Apostle! Oh Death where is thy sting, Oh Grave where is thy victory!

Such a death scene as hers is not exhibited on earth to no purpose. Religion is seen then in an aspect in which it is seen no where else, and those who have looked on such a scene for the first time, have seen the worth of a hope in Jesus Christ as they never saw it before. Men do not die thus under any other influence. Heaven is not thus brought down around the bed of the sinner. If the veriest infidel on earth had stood by that dying bed, and been unshaken by it, we should say his infidelity is in his heart and not in his understanding. If any who were permitted to witness such a scene are not profited by it, it certainly will not be because it was not eminently calculated to exert a saving influence.

A natural thought, suggested by the death of such a Christian mother, exerting so blessed an influence, and leaving behind her so many needing so much her care, counsel and prayers, is that the loss to her family is irreparable. In one sense this is true. Such a mother's place can never be filled. Those who have so often in childhood's days looked up into that face and spoken the endearing name of mother, will see that face and hear that voice no more; and wherever in this wide world they may wander, and into whatever circumstances or relations they may be brought, there will never cease to come times when they will think with sadness of their early bereavement. Those too young to retain in memory a mother's image will be made to feel often, as they come up into life, that there is for them no living fountain of a mother's love. There is a void in that hitherto unbroken circle that must ever remain.

But there is another view in which we must not look on any of our earthly losses as irreparable. God is able more than to make them up to us in spiritual good. If any earthly good is a cord that binds the soul to an earthly portion and earthly hopes, and if the severing of that cord results in the upward flight of the spirit to heavenly hopes and a heavenly portion, the loss will be a blessing. If the death of this Christian mother shall beget in each member of the family circle the habitual contemplation of her as in heaven, the habitual effort to bring the spirit of that family of which she is a member now into the earthly family, and to secure a preparation to join her "beyond the clouds—beyond the tomb," so that they shall meet at last an unbroken family in the kingdom of God, this present loss will be repaired.

Another thought which arises is, how selfish is our grief when such friends die! You know that love, when divested of its element of selfishness, rejoices in the happiness of the beloved object. The mother, as she loves her son, would forever retain him around her, that the fountain of maternal tenderness may be kept full and gushing by his presence. But convince her that his happiness will be greatly enhanced, and his good promoted, and she will joyfully give him up for a season to wander in foreign lands. If a spirit that was tossed here as on a troubled sea, that knew sore conflicts with sin and sorrow, that lived in constant dread of death, has at last found rest, is safely over Jordan in the presence of its God and Saviour and eternally blessed, excessive grief in us must be too selfish.

I know indeed that the nearer our friends are fitted for heaven the more is their society worth to us; but we must remember that but few of our race have been favored with the known presence of angels, and such visits when enjoyed must not be expected to continue long. We should be willing that purified and glorified spirits should have their home in the skies.

There is much in connection with this thought and the death of the departed to work a quiet submission to the will of God. Your wife, mother, sister, child, has left the most satisfactory evidence that she has gone to the better land. You surely would not call back her glorified spirit. You would not tear from her brow her amaranthine crown. You would not despoil

her of her white robe. You would not take from her hands her immortal harp, and bring her back to taste again the sorrows and struggles of this world. When Christ began to purify that soul, he reserved to himself the right, when his work was done, to take it to himself. Now that he has done it, though he asks not that you should not mourn, he requires that you should yield in sweet submission to his will.

This providence has seemed to me to speak with a peculiar voice to the bereaved to make sure of a preparation to meet the departed in heaven, and on this point I will dwell a moment.

God has as it were brought heaven down into your sight, has shown you what religion is worth to the dying, and how utterly hopeless and unsupported in such an hour we must any of us be without it. Much of the sweetest enjoyment of the past, that which is laid up in the most sacred treasuries of the memory, is connected with the departed. You have been cheered in your sorrows by the thought that her spirit yet lives, and the sweet hope of seeing her in the better land. You could not bear the thought of an eternal separation, that you have looked on her for the last time forever, and shall speak to her and hear her voice no more. But you should never forget that all the white robes in heaven are washed in Redeeming blood. There is but one path to that world, and in it you must walk as she walked, if you would meet her there. If you are conscious of a want of preparation for heaven, do not delay making it, lest you fail, and there be no union between you and the blessed.

Children! you remember how important your mother felt religion to be, and how anxious she was that you should embrace it. You remember her prayers and counsels. May you never forget them, and whenever you are tempted to sin may your mother's image be a guard in your heart, and oh if you would give new joy to her spirit in heaven, as she looks down upon you, "remember now your Creator in the days of your youth;" seek the same Saviour she loved, serve the same God she served, and you shall see her again beyond the grave.

Husband! God gave you for many years to be your companion one of his children. You have seen something of her holy

example. You have known something of her spiritual life. God has now come and taken her to himself, not obscurely, not secretly, but openly. You have seen her triumphant death. You do not doubt that she is now with her God and Saviour, for you heard the approach of the chariot wheels which he sent to take her to himself. You saw her departure. It should be yours henceforth to follow in her footsteps as she followed her Saviour. For the sake of the children she has left to your care, and for the sake of a union with her pure spirit, you should evermore keep heaven in view through the cross of Christ.

Brothers and sisters! If your departed sister was a lost sinner, so are you. If she needed a personal interest in Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners, so do you. If religion had power to support her in life and death, it has power to support you. If in the awful hour she must have been hopeless without it, so must you be if any of you come without it to your dying bed. Hear then the exhortation of her dying hour. Hold all earthly things as vain. Lead holy lives. Seek her Saviour and her God.

Aged Parents! God is loosening your attachments to earth. A treasure you could not hope to enjoy here long, by reason of death, he has taken before you to himself. May that religion which carried her safely through to the end, be more and more the stay of your declining years till you meet her in heaven; and may the end of your course be as peaceful and triumphant as hers.

For us all we can ask nothing more than that we may die as she died, and spend our eternity where she is.

This providence speaks loudly to this church. How often have we said, who will be the first representative from this branch of Zion* to the church above? The deceased, I am told, often spoke of this. We thought not of her, and yet how grateful should we be to God that the first member of this church has gone without a doubt in her own mind, and leaving

---

* The church was organized January 10th, 1849, and this was the first death in it.

no doubt behind her in our minds of her membership in the church on Mount Zion.

God has broken our ranks. We come around our communion table to-day as a stricken family, because one who has had a seat with us at this table has gone up to the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven. Shall we not strive to place our soul in her soul's stead, and look on earthly things as she looked on them from her dying pillow? Shall we not strive to bring heaven down around our daily course as it came down around her dying couch? As God has begun to lessen by death, shall we not cry unto him that the Spirit may descend and more than fill the places that are made vacant? Who can endure the thought that this church shall be diminishing by death and none coming in from the world?

And oh that we might all live lives as blameless as was that of our departed sister; that we might all feel as deep an interest in the welfare of Zion; that when this church are called, one after another, to testify for Christ amid the cold waters of Jordan, each one may do it with as much assurance as she did, till we all meet in heaven.